building duration
a house living toward death

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I could just remember how my father used to say that
the reason for living
was to get ready to
stay dead
a long time.

William Faulkner, As I Lay Dying
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ABSTRACT

The house, living toward death, is composed of aspects that call the dweller to death and to life. Death is reflected in a stone foundation and walls for the private quarters of the home, for rest and daily preparations. These ground the dweller in ultimate rest. Life is reflected in rooms of timber that create a place for nourishment, entertaining, and leisure during the day. The centerpiece of the house is a stone hearth that adjoins the stages of the house - stone and timber, death and life. Just as the stages of life are nonlinear, the stone and timber construction of the house meet and acknowledge each other and their respective roles. For example, the sleeping quarters have a stone foundation but east-facing walls of wood remind the sleeper that activity calls and that rest in the house is not permanent.

A key feature of the home is its moment of transition to the west, where the dweller is prepared to encounter and acknowledge final rest in the attached cemetery. Two rotating doors create a space for the caretaker to access the cemetery through a moment of transition. In this moment, the caretaker accesses her tools and reorients her mind. Transitioning to the outdoors, the caretaker must ascend to the cemetery and pauses on landing when eye-height with her charges, the headstones. Upon return from the cemetery, the moment of transition is a moment to remove dirt, clean, and again reorient to the living.
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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT
Life is a transition through stages, framed by birth and death. We transition through life in a nonlinear fashion, moving sometimes closer to, and sometimes farther from, rest. Daily, we rise for living and fall to rest. Daily, we prepare for activity and prepare for sleep. Daily we age and endure, but our burdens may lighten with the coming of Spring or a new member to the family.

In reverence to the stages of life, I have designed a house living toward death - a house that provides a meaningful setting for the stages of life and our daily transitions. The house provides a dwelling for a cemetery caretaker, whose very vocation is a daily encounter with death.
All the world’s a stage,
   And all the men and women merely players.
   They have their exits and their entrances,
   And one man in his time plays many parts,
   His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
   Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.
Then, the whining school-boy with his satchel
   And shining morning face, creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
   Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
   Made to his mistress’ eyebrow. Then, a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
   Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth. And then, the justice,
   In fair round belly, with a good capon lin’d,
With eyes severe, and beard of formal cut,
   Full of wise saws, and modern instances,
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
   Into the lean and slipper’d pantaloon,
   With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well sav’d, a world too wide
   For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
   Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
   And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

William Shakespeare, As You Like It
DEDICATION

To the life of Matthew Musial, the lover, never to become a soldier.

To the life of Norbert Koch, the lean and slipper’d pantaloon. Rest in peace.
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Most importantly, I would like to thank my family. Mom, Dad, and Mike, thank you for your unconditional love. Charlie, Evie, and Nala, thank you for giving me new life and new challenges. Sarah, words cannot express my gratitude and your importance to my life. I love you, despite it all!

I would also like to thank the strangers I pass and those who history books will never mention. Thank you for teaching me sonder and empathy.

† sonder n. the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own (The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows)
# building duration

a house living toward death

## STAGES

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... architectural duration implies a past that is caught up in the present and anticipates the future.

Mohsen Mostafavi and David Leatherbarrow, *On Weathering: The Life of Buildings in Time*
impregnation concept
LEONARDO DA VINCI'S VITRUVIAN MAN
GEOMETRY OF HUMAN BODY FITTING WITHIN THE EARTHLY AND HEAVENLY

WHITE PINE TREE
MANE IS KNOWN AS "THE PINE TREE STATE"

LUMBER CUTTING DIAGRAM
MANE IS KNOWN AS "THE LUMBER STATE"

COFFIN
MEASURED ACCORDING TO THE HUMAN BODY

Vitruvian Man
White Pine Tree
Plain Sawing
Build Your Own Coffin
Sun is pulled by force from Earth to create life. He spends his life painting the sky with endless shades of blue, gold, and white.

Eastern White Pine Tree shoots from Earth pushing his way. His deep roots keep him connected to Earth.

Earth sends sweet life into Sugar Maple Tree. His roots grow long from her nourishment.

Earth's gentle curves expand and contract. Man shows Earth his affection with a kiss.

The compass glistens in the golden light. The square sets Man straight.

Sun dies and is buried by Earth.
“Age Staircase for a Couple”

Le cours de la vie de l’homme dans ses différents âges “The Course of Life of Man in his Different Ages”
The Various Ages and Degrees of Human Life Explained by These Twelve Different Stages

1. Infancy
2. Childhood
3. Adolescence
4. Early Adulthood
5. Midlife
6. Late Adulthood
7. Old Age
8. Uber-Old Age
9. Infirmity
10. Death
11. Judgement
12. Heaven
Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death

Wheel of the Ten Ages of Man
Steps of Life
Life Stages from Infancy to Old Age

3150 BC
Egyptians advanced preservation in stone sarcophagi and decorated wooden containers

700 AD
Celts were buried in boxes constructed out of flat stones

900 AD
Vikings sent deceased out to sea in a burning ship

early 1600 AD
French coined "coffin" from Greek "kophinos" for "basket"

mid 1800 AD
The American Civil War required mass production of coffins thus creating the casket industry

late 1800 AD
The American Civil War required mass production of coffins thus creating the casket industry

Build Your Own Coffin

Wheel of the Ten Ages of Man
Steps of Life
Life Stages from Infancy to Old Age

COFFIN CONFORMS TO THE ANATOMY OF THE HUMAN BODY

CASKET IS A RECTANGLE

Cut List
(a) Upper (short) side 24 3/8 x 18 2
(b) Lower (long) side 56 3/8 x 18 2
(c) Top/lid   80 x 26  1
(d) Head end  16 x 18  1
(e) Toe end   12 x 18  1
(f) Floor   80 x 26  1
(g) Bottom rails  53 x 2  2
(h) Bottom rails  20 x 2  2
(i) Side/end ribs  14 x 2  12
(j) Joiner ribs  14 x 4  2
(k) Floor rib   78 x 2  1

COFFIN PLANS

Top View
End View
Side View
3D View

Coffin Plans

Cut List
(a) Upper (short) side 24 3/8 x 18 2
(b) Lower (long) side 56 3/8 x 18 2
(c) Top/lid   80 x 26  1
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Coffin
Lid

(1) Head Corner Detail
(2) Side Rib Detail
(3) Toe Corner Detail

600,000 BC
Neanderthals in Eurasia were buried in shallow graves with personal items, including stone tools and animal bones

CoFFIN DECONSTRUCTION

Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death
The New York Times
December 22, 1900
Books of the Season

The Salt-Box House
by Jane de Forest Shelton

Saltbox

Salt was a valuable commodity in colonial America. To prevent the salt from taking up, special saltboxes were designed that were hung by the hearth to keep the salt dried out.

The shape evolved organically from the need for additional space for growing families and adding a lean-to was an economical way to enlarge the house.

The practical and simple saltbox was often a single room deep. Construction was timber framing, or post-and-beam construction, joining large pieces of wood with woodworking joints, such as mortise-and-tenon joints, or with wooden pegs, braces, or trusses. Expensive metal nails were sparingly used.

The long, low pitch of the back of the roof faced North, where possible, to partially deflect the blustering snow and rain that frequently came along with the North wind.

The lean-to addition on the house bore a substantial resemblance to the saltboxes in the hearth, and thus the name for the style was born.

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Books of the Season

The Saltbox House
by Jane de Forest Shelton

When she was nearly eighty she wrote again, without melancholy:

"If my house have no occupant but myself, no hurry, very little work and care, my house is clean and still, nothing disturbed or out of place, and these quiet times in my own house suit me exactly— and somebody’s growing old! that tells the story."

Soon after Miss Mary’s death the house died also, in the sense of sinking into collapse and becoming uninhabitable. This little book devoted to its memory in pleasant reading, lacking only illustrations to make it unusually attractive addition to the hobby book counters.
birth
site analysis
Wells, Maine  

1653 - 1675
- land: glaciers retreated 6,000 years ago, twisting and turning rocks
- people: Abenaki Indians settled Webhannet “at the clear stream”
- building: 1641 - Edward Littlefield established a permanent home and sawmill
- town: 1653 - Wells is incorporated as the third town in Maine
- perseverance: 1675-1730 - only Maine town not conquered during the Indian Wars
- prosperity: 18th Century - excellent agricultural and shipbuilding businesses
- early 19th Century - strong fishing, shipping, and timber industries
- connectivity: mid 19th Century - railroad provided employment and accessibility
- tourism: late 19th Century - beaches became summer destinations
- environmentalism: early 21st Century - case study for MIT’s “Climate Adaptation Project”

Wells, Maine b. 1653 - d.

Wells, Wells Village, Ogunquit

Plan of Ocean View Cemetery, Wells, ME
"We are on the rock, but it is growing smaller. Soon the water will be over it."
We are on the rock, but it is growing smaller. Soon the water will be over it.
life
process
the caretaker leaves the cemetery
she exhales
she pushes the wood door
the door rotates around a joint
it connects to a second door
the doors form a right angle
the doors scrape the ground
one door opens in front of her
the other door closes behind her
she faces a stone wall
she sees a tool in a niche
a sink
she is leaving a place
she is entering a place
she wonders

moment of transition
the caretaker leaves the house
she inhales
she pushes the wood door
the door rotates around a joint
it connects a second door
the doors form a right angle
the doors scrape the ground
one door opens in front of her
the other door closes behind her
she faces a stone wall
she sees a tool in a niche
a shovel
she is leaving a place
she is entering a place
she wonders

moment of transition
construct  fill  finish
Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death
soul
moment of observation
moment of contemplation
the caretaker leaves the house
she steps on the stone
she ascends
she steps along the stone wall
the wall reveals a cut
she puts her hand in the cut
it is a handrail
she touches the stone
she holds the building
she is steadied

she steps on the stone
she descends
the caretaker enters the house
the caretaker leaves the cemetery
her boots bring mud
mud on the path
footprints
the stone house welcomes her
she enters the niche
a boot scrape at her feet
a cut in the wall at her hands
she puts her hand in the cut
it is a handrail
she touches the stone
she holds the building
she is steadied
she raises her foot
she scrapes her boot
the mud falls
footprints

boot scrape
death
presentation
Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death
Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death
Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death
Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death
memory
documentation
Plan of Ocean View Cemetery, Wells, ME
Building Duration: A House Living Toward Death
south elevation
north-south section
looking west
east-west section
looking north
Robert Kocher
east-west section
looking north
north-south section looking west
CHRONICLE

2017
A stone and timber house is designed and built for the caretaker of Ocean View Cemetery and is passed through three generations of caretakers.

84 years pass

2101
Ocean View Cemetery no longer has the funds or the need for a caretaker. The house is abandoned.

52 years pass

2153
The Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge purchases the house to commemorate the 500th Anniversary of Wells and converts the house into a nature center.

92 years pass

2245
To celebrate the 500th Anniversary of the town’s founding, the cemetery and house are provided with funds for much needed maintenance.

183 years pass

2428
The tide now reaches the base of the pier structure supporting the house. The floodplain now includes the site of the house and the house is condemned.

225 years pass
To celebrate the 1,000th Anniversary of the town’s founding, volunteers mark the former headstone locations using crosses carved from salvaged timbers from the house.

30 years pass

The wood structure collapses into the ocean during a hurricane.

62 years pass

A stone monument is erected at the former entrance to Ocean View Cemetery to commemorate the 1,000th Anniversary of the cemetery. It does not mention the house.

31 years pass

To celebrate the second millennium of the United States, a developer purchased and transformed much of the coast of Wells, including the former Rachel Carson Wildlife Refuge, to create a year-round seaside resort in the now subtropical climate of southern Maine. The former site of Ocean View Cemetery is converted into an oceanfront garden with paths created from stones found on the site.

56 years pass

A powerful hurricane forces the seaside resort to close.

321 years pass

A book detailing the history of Wells is published to celebrate the town’s 1,500th Anniversary. Ocean View Cemetery is noted but there is no mention of the house.


IMAGE CREDIT


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To die will be an awfully big adventure.

J.M. Barrie, Peter Pan